

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 387 452

SP 036 213

AUTHOR Brylinsky, Jody
TITLE Diffusing of Gender Equity in Sport: Using Innovation vs. Compliance.
PUB DATE 94
NOTE 21p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Athletics; *Change Strategies; Civil Rights Legislation; *Compliance (Legal); Elementary Secondary Education; *Equal Education; Equal Facilities; Federal Legislation; Females; Higher Education; Models; Sex Discrimination; *Sex Fairness; Values

IDENTIFIERS *Equity Theory; *Title IX Education Amendments 1972

ABSTRACT

This paper examines how treating equity conflicts in sports through an emphasis on compliance with Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972 has actually hindered the mass adoption of gender equity in sport and proposes that applying the principles of diffusion would allow desired change to occur as an innovation and therefore be more readily accepted. The nature of such a paradigm shift is considered and support is offered for the perceived failure of the compliance approach due to violation of such theoretical principles as obtaining the understanding and support of administrators and providing real consequences for not changing behaviors. Societal reasons for the unacceptability of the compliance approach are identified, such as the need for the innovative idea to demonstrate an advantage and social support of the idea. In contrast, changing the paradigm to that of innovation is seen in terms of commonly accepted equity principles. Possible system failure points for principle-based equity are identified including: (1) failure of the innovation to offer a relative advantage over existing practices; (2) failure of communication; (3) adoption failure; and (4) failure in innovation implementation. Application of equity principles is seen as permitting adoption in discrete stages and in an empowering climate for dealing with the more difficult resource issues. (Contains 14 references.) (DB)

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Diffusing of Gender Equity In Sport:
Using Innovation vs Compliance

Jody Brylinsky, Ph.D.
Department of Physical Education
4024 Student Recreation Center
Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, MI 49008
(616)-387-2677

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The Diffusing of Gender Equity In Sport:

Using Innovation vs Compliance

Abstract

This discussion examines how treating equity conflicts through compliance has hindered the mass adoption of gender equity in sport. Dialogue demonstrates how utilizing the principles of diffusion provides a systematic approach to considering gender equity as an innovation in coaching and sport leadership.

Diffusing Gender Equity in Sport: Using Innovation vs Compliance

Introduction

Why, after more than 20 years since the enactment of Title IX, are women still looking for gender equity in sport programs? Why, when 40% of the American population believes in women's rights, (Aburdene & Naisbitt, 1992) are male athletic programs initiating a new fight against gender equity compliance? Why, in 1995 is gender equity still considered an unreachable state of affairs in collegiate and interscholastic sport? This paper will suggest that the traditional view of adopting gender equity through compliance behavior has stunted the actualization of gender equity in sport. Instead, using the principles of diffusion in bringing about gender equity would allow change to occur as an innovation and therefore be more readily accepted in society.

A Paradigm Shift from Forced Compliance to Diffusion

The adoption of a new idea or innovation in society occurs in a systematic and somewhat predictable manner, called diffusion. Everett M. Rogers (Aburdene, & Naisbitt, 1992) brought the notion of diffusion out of the physical sciences and applied it to the systematic pattern of societal acceptance of new practices and beliefs. According to the principles of diffusion, an innovation is increasingly accepted by proportions of society. Eventually enough momentum is established that further acceptance is self

perpetuating, similar to a chain reaction in physics. Rogers calls this point of acceptance "critical mass", the point at which the adoption of a new idea becomes self-sustaining. In the sociological context, the threshold for critical mass ranges from 5 to 20% of a population (Aburdene & Naisbitt, 1992).

Aburdene and Naisbitt (1992) have coined the term "megatrend" to indicate when the traditional or accepted social paradigm no longer makes sense and is replaced by an innovation. In order for the diffusion of a new idea to occur there needs to be a paradigm shift, or a break with traditional thinking. Paradigm comes from the Greek word *paradigma*: a pattern or map for understanding and explaining certain aspects of reality (Covey, 1991). The paradigm shift necessary to bring about gender equity in sport involves an innovative use of diffusion rather than forced compliance of gender equity principles.

The Failure of Equity Compliance

Compliance behaviors are those brought about by external constraints such as legislation and laws, or self imposed reward or punishment contingencies. The compliant individual knows what is expected as the desired behavior, and appreciates the consequences of straying from this expectation (Green & Simons-Morton, 1984). The enactment of Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972 provided a clear message as to what was the expected institutional behavior regarding equity in sport. However, the expectation that society would comply with Title IX was unfounded based on the violation of two theoretical premises.

The first premise violated by a compliance paradigm, was that administrators would understand the desired programmatic change necessary for gender equity and consider it to be important, in this case for the benefit of their sports programs. Historically, athletic programs did not see the value or need of supporting women's athletic programs to the extent of men's programs, much of which was based on the differences between men and women. Debate over the existence of physiological and psychological differences in male and female athletes worked as a counter force to equity movements in athletics. In the social context of inequity, group difference research tended to have an undesirable bias toward "rationalizing and illuminating rather than rectifying unequal power relations" (Bredemeier, 1992, p. 199). When gender differences are seen as natural, it is easier to argue that women should not enjoy social equity with men (Bredemeier, 1992). In other words since women are different they need not be treated equally.

An equally important violation of the first compliance premise was that gender equity would be beneficial to the athletic program. For more than 20 years the NCAA lobbied against full implementation of Title IX. The report of the NCAA 1992 Gender Equity Task Force on Gender Equity met with fiercely negative reactions from Division I football coaches even though it contained no enforcement mechanism and left compliance up to the individual schools (Harman, 1993). As recent as the 1994 NCAA convention, heated dialogue on the failure of the NCAA to reinstate a 14th scholarship to men's basketball was centered

around gender equity issues.

A second necessary premise for compliance motivated behavior, is that established environmental constraints must provide real consequences for not changing the behavior to that prescribed by the new norm. Title IX has been enforced by the Office of Civil Rights, Department of Education, rather than the Department of Justice. Prior to the *Franklin v. Gwinnett* Supreme Court decision there was no awarding of punitive damage in Title IX civil cases. The consequence of not complying were limited to simply changing past behaviors and promising to never do it again. There was no penalty for not adhering to the law. A review of state equal education laws in the late '80s found that only 13 states had adopted the minimum provisions required by federal Title IX law (Faludi, 1991). For example, one of the provisions was concerned with equitable spending. The 1992 NCAA report on gender equity indicated an average spending ratio of men to women of 3.19:1 (Leonard, 1993). Forced compliance for some institutions meant eliminating minor or nonrevenue generating male sport offerings, devastating to the athletes, but no real punishment to the football/basketball-egocentric institution.

The Unacceptability of Compliance

It is both the characteristics of the population and the innovation itself that affect the timing of critical mass or acceptance of an innovative idea (Green & Simon-Morton, 1984). There are seven characteristics that have been identified to impact the rate of adoption of an innovation (See Table 1).

Applying these characteristics to compliance issues in gender equity demonstrates why there has been little adoption in 20 plus years.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

First, does the innovative idea demonstrate some relative advantage? In other words, what is the benefit to those adopting the innovative behaviors over that of traditional beliefs? Considering the past 20 years, there appears to have been little relative advantage of adopting a gender equity stance in traditionally male dominated athletic programs. When men were reaping the economic and egocentric benefits of prioritizing men's sport programs over women, what advantage could there be to considering gender equity in programmatic decisions? Patriarchal hegemony in sport, as in society, had created barriers that reduced female sport leadership and power (Miner, 1993). As indicated before, since non-compliance carried little, if any, penalty, there was no apparent relative advantage to change from a male dominated perspective to one of gender equity.

Secondly, would the adoption of forced equity be socially supported? Although there had been tremendous social change during the years of Title IX passage, there was little evidence that social attitudes toward women in society would support full equity of women in sport. According to Susan Faludi in her book Backlash (1991), "the last decade has seen a powerful counter-assault on women's rights, a backlash, an attempt to retract the handful of small and hard-won victories that the feminist movement did manage to win for women" (p. 28). While sport remains a human

act, unrelated to gender (Nelson, 1991) women are compared to the performance standards of men, and the results of those comparisons generally suggest that women can not really do what men do (Leonard, 1993). When women did excel in sports, they were seen as the exception, not the rule, and therefore not the social norm.

Third, since most of human behavior is socially motivated, members of society will be more likely to adopt a behavior that can be entered into with some caution, one step at a time (divisibility), and with some notion that you could change your mind and return to past ways if necessary (reversibility). Since forced compliance was brought about in most cases by an external force (legal action) all relevant equity factors must enter into consideration, dictating an all-or-none perspective. Institutions were often forced to attempt to solve all gender inequity factors at one time. Records show that once an institution opened the door to resolving equity, there was no turning back.

Next, was forced equity a complex issue, influencing a number of other actions? Simple, unambiguous directions allow for an innovation to be readily chosen. Forced compliance of gender equity fell short in this respect in two ways; deep rooted traditions and economically induced scrutiny of athletic programs. The structure and function of many men's and women's athletic programs are deeply rooted in tradition. This tradition is often the sole rationale for why and how decisions have been made in sport. A frequent argument to Title IX regulations was "we won't be able to do this any more", or "how will it affect what is already in place?". Equity issues would create change at the very

heart of traditionally administered and funded athletic programs.

There is the common mis-perception that male sports generate income to the extent of being supportive of the women's programs. A closer look reflects that the "so-called 'revenue generating' sports are actually the 'revenue consuming' sports in athletic programs" (Miner, 1993, p. 47). As the search for funding increases so does the complexity of the distribution of resources. The desire to protect what one has, inhibits the adoption of new ideas until it no longer becomes economically feasible to resist change.

Finally, communication of forced gender equity would have been necessary if adoption of the idea was going to become self-sustaining. Mass adoption of an idea will not occur if no one but the innovators know about it. Innovative experiences that can be communicated to others on a frequent basis are more likely to be tried by those most resisting the innovation. Forced compliance connotes an image of doing something wrong, getting caught and now having to subordinate oneself to a higher power. It is highly unlikely that powerful athletic institutions that have been forced into compliance by Title IX law will avidly communicate this with the public. Further, the limited coverage of women's sports in the media reflects that equity compliance is not warranted or at best unimportant. "Media defines and reinforces the hegemonic image that sport is a rite of passage for males and only males seriously participate and excel at the skilled levels" (Miner, 1993, p. 46). Men receive more than 96.5% of newsprint coverage and 95% of television coverage (Miner, 1993). Even programs

adopting equity standards are hindered in communicating the innovation of their policies due to sexist sport terminology and promotion styles that trivializes the participation of women.

Changing the Paradigm to that of Innovation

The value of utilizing an innovative principle-based approach to fostering gender equity, rather than that of compliance, is that it provides a more readily promotable innovation. Unlike compliance, approaching equity as an innovation through principle-based thinking is adoptable. Innovations are novel behaviors or ideas that are unfamiliar in the general way of doing things, but are being presented as a new and better way of doing something (Green, & Simon-Morton, 1984). By active interest in and trial acceptance of the innovative behavior, society is able to adopt ideas as they are reconsidered in light of their relative advantage to traditional behaviors. Past athletic policy would not be an issue in considering gender equity; rather, the value of treating women fairly could be considered in a new perspective without risk to established goals. As the skills of principle based sport programming are developed, athletic personnel realize new ways of thinking in which equity becomes one of many guiding principles. Equity then becomes a means of achieving stated goals rather than an opposing or conflicting end. This could counter a major impediment to gender equity--the fear that men's athletics must suffer if women's athletics is to move towards equity.

The Innovation of Equity Principles

The approach to diffusing gender equity in sport will rely on gender equity being seen as a naturally evolving innovation of modern sport. As such, gender equity must be identified as an inherent principle of sport. Principles are not invented by individuals or by society, but are the laws of the universe that pertain to human relationships and human organizations (Covey, 1991). Covey further states that principles provide vision and direction not like a map, but like a compass, pointing the way. Unlike values, principles are objective and externally constructed. Principles provide the freedom for new knowledge or ways of seeing because they aren't reliant on past values and knowledge, which has been the main problem with current attempts at achieving gender equity. Gender equity as a principle is consistent with a moral basis for action to guide behavior in athletics. Institutions such as sport, are guided by institutional purposes which are the collective intended ends of each sports contest. A moral point of view allows for a consistent rationale for decisions throughout the sport structure, from administration of the program to behavior within the sports contest (Fraleigh, 1984).

The moral point of view is simply to be guided by the notion that your actions should be meant for everybody (universal) and are for the good of everyone alike (reversible). The NCAA Gender Equity Task Force (1993) proposed the following definition of gender equity:

"At an institutional level, gender equity in

intercollegiate athletics describes an environment in which fair and equitable distribution of overall athletics opportunities, benefits and resources is available to women and men and in which student-athletes, coaches and athletics administrators are not subject to gender-based discrimination. An athletics program is gender equitable when either the men's or women's sports program would be pleased to accept as its own the overall program of the other gender." (Pickle, 1993, p. 1)

On the other hand when sport exists from a self-interest perspective, it invites chaos, distrust, fear and rampant disregard of one participant for another (Fraleigh, 1984). Baier (1958) further articulates the value of a moral basis for action:

"...now looking at the world from the point of view of anyone. We are not examining particular alternative courses of action before this or that person; we are examining two alternative worlds, one in which moral reasons are always treated by everyone as superior to reasons of self-interest and one in which the reverse is the practice" (p.46).

Although sport may be viewed from alternative points of view, i.e. economics, health, or politics, by promoting gender equity under the principles of a moral point of view, sports contests may also be instrumentally effective in leading to extrinsic values (Fraleigh, 1984). The following section will demonstrate how using the principles of gender equity from a moral point of view can be readily diffused in society as a welcome and natural innovation.

Adoptability of Principle-Based Equity

A modern conceptualization of the diffusion process typically views each step as a potential failure point - "a critical barrier that must be overcome for the overall system to achieve a lasting and meaningful impact" (Orlandi, Landers, Weston & Haley, 1990, p. 292). The innovation of gender equity will be discussed for each of the potential system failure points.

Innovation failure occurs if the innovation does not bring about its intended end, in other words does not really have a relative advantage over existing practices (Orlandi, Landers, Weston, & Haley, 1990). Principle based logic for gender equity allows for the diffusion of equity as an innovation. The relative advantage of adopting equity based behaviors over that of forcing compliance from traditional hegemonic values, is that it is based on new behaviors and beliefs. The NCAA has already proposed new principles for student-athlete welfare and access that identify the inherent values of gender equity (NCAA, 1994). The inherent promise of proceeding from a moral reasoning point of view is that all participants are better off when athletic programs adhere to gender equity, since sport itself is advanced by such behavior.

The second potential failure point is that of a communication failure. An innovation can be genuinely efficacious and have the potential to achieve its intended end yet fail to do so if the general population is unaware of the innovation or improperly informed as to its availability or applicability (Orlandi, Landers, Weston, & Haley, 1990). Nothing is discussed more in society than gender related issue, unless it is the violation of

civil rights. It is much more comfortable to communicate about your "right actions" than your ability to get around the rules. There are many ways in which innovative programs can demonstrate gender equity principles on an everyday basis, such as media coverage about effective coaching of women's teams; material describing facilities and equipment utilized by both men's and women's programs; equitable sports medicine services; dialogs about rules or rule changes that will provide equal opportunity for all to perform well while abiding by the spirit and letter of the rule.

The third potential failure point is adoption failure. Though efficacious and properly communicated, an innovation may not be adopted because of differing values and belief systems or a perceived lack of necessary resources (Orlandi, Landers, Weston, & Haley, 1990). Adopting a principle-based logic to gender equity is compatible with the economic and philosophical value system of our society. It makes good economical sense that if "3500 U. S. companies are going to spend \$1.35 billion in sponsoring sporting events" (Leonard, 1993, p. 331), they would target the fastest growing segment of sport participants - women. Women are the majority of participants in the seven most popular fitness activities and nearly half of the new golfers are women (Aberden & Naisbitt, 1993). While there has been nearly a 500% increase in numbers of girls participating in sports since Title IX (Aberdene and Naisbitt, 1993), girls and women's sport still only make up only 35% of high school athletes (Leonard, 1993) and female college athletes are outnumbered 2.24:1 men (Leonard, 1993).

Economically this would indicate the growth potential in well marketed women's sport programs.

Interest is the heart of the issue in gender equity adoption. Only a program in which participation rates mirror the overall enrollment of the student body has the diffusion reached its critical mass, the point of self-sustainment. Since women's interest has been discouraged due to a historical lack of opportunity or encouragement, the innovation of gender equity would foster the diffusion of interest as well. Interest and opportunity would become mutually supportive concepts rather than evaluation criteria. A demonstration of mutual growth in interest and opportunity occurred when the Office of Civil Rights published its first regulations to implement Title IX. High school programs accommodated the interest of one million additional female participants between 1970 and 1974 without any stimulation (financial) from the government. Statistics suggest that much of the gender equity compliance was a "result of growth" in girls athletics as much as a "cause of growth" in girls athletics (Roberts, 1992).

Another failure point involves implementation of the innovation. Despite being successfully adopted, an innovation may not be implemented properly or even implemented at all due to specific program components. This is especially likely when the innovation is adopted at the organizational level rather than through its membership. Since applying principle-based logic to equity is a simple and individual behavior, each member of an institution can enact change or adoption of the innovation. In

its simplest form, the principle of gender equity asks "is this action for the good of everybody and everyone alike", therefore bringing about a moral reasoning to athletics. The principles of gender equity are applicable to widely diverse circumstances and times, and allow for a systematic process for prioritizing actions when conflicts arise. The prioritization will not carry with it the threat of self interest and potential conflict, rather the convincing trust that your actions are the "right thing to do" and therefore will be supported by the majority of early adopters. Early adopters are usually the high status, power centers of an organization who have an attentive following quick to accept the lead in the adoption of new ideas.

Implementation of gender equity is also facilitated by the situational and interactive process of resolving conflict through principle based-thinking, as it facilitates a divisible process of adoption. Each equity issue can be dealt with in its own context, allowing for a systematic plan of how to approach the more complex resource issues. Title IX legal consultants are attempting to get clients to approach gender equity by committing to the principle of gender equity prior to conducting a review of current practices. Each member of the athletic program can then enter into the process of adopting gender equity with something to gain rather than focusing on competing for scarce financial resources. Since actions are based on the vision for the future, rather than past behaviors or tradition, the reversibility of the action is less of an issue, and other programs of discrimination are often positively influenced as well (e.g. non-revenue

producing men's sports).

Summary

Although there appears to be the critical mass necessary to create the mass adoption of gender equity in sport, using compliance as the vehicle of its diffusion has worked as a counter force against its acceptance. Reframing gender equity in terms of the moral principles of sport allows gender equity to be more readily diffused as an innovation. Diffusion principles gives athletic programs the opportunity to see gender equity as a natural innovation, not a competing force that threatens the status quo. Equity principles are easily diffused as an innovation since they provide a relative advantage over that of compliance. Equity principles permit adoption to occur in discrete stages and in an empowering climate for dealing with the more difficult resource issues. Considering equity as an innovation, rather than delimiting all issues to that of gender equity compliance, provides each institution with the vision to create the best solution to their specific gender equity conflicts. Such resolution is easily communicated as a positive aspect of an already highly visible medium - sport. The innovation of the principles of sport rather than the socially created role structures of equity compliance, will create a self-sustaining change in women's sports.

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Table 1

Characteristics of an Innovation that Influences Diffusion.

* Relative advantage - Any new idea must be able to demonstrate that there would be some gain or benefit in its adoption when compared with traditional behaviors.

* Compatibility - The new behavior must be linked to existing social, cultural and philosophical norms. Adoption would rely on the user perceiving that their image has been enhanced by the new behavior.

* Divisibility and reversibility - The new behavior can be entered into on a limited scale and with some caution. Innovations in which the consequences of adoption can be reversed or have no lasting affect are also more readily diffused.

* Complexity - The user must understand how to demonstrate the new behavior. Those actions that are independent and have less affect on other actions can be chosen more frequently by a new user.

* Communicability - Innovative experiences that can be communicated to others on a frequent basis are more likely to be tried.

note: Concepts modified from Green, & Simons-Morton, 1984, p. 198-199.